

EPA REGION III

◇Office of Public Affairs

◇◇PM Headline

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***** PM HOT LIST *****

EPA Testing Dimock Water

WBGH.COM (late Friday) The EPA has completed well water sampling at 11 homes in Dimock this week. The EPA says it is also bringing in a truckload of water to four families each day. Daily water deliveries will continue until the EPA gets a better idea as to how much water each home needs. These are moves that have stepped on the toes - so to speak - of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and Cabot Oil and Gas. Late last year, the DEP agreed with Cabot that the water in Dimock is safe and Cabot could stop delivering water to a group of families who presumably had their wells contaminated by drilling operations. However, the EPA says it's concerned with some of the results that the DEP and Cabot think are fine, so it's doing more testing. Trish Taylor says, "It's been reviewed for chemical compounds that we know are associated with drilling operations as well as heavy metals and organics in other compounds that we normally would look at to see if there were other potential health risks." Water deliveries will continue at least for about another five weeks, until test results come back. The EPA is conducting split sampling with the DEP and Cabot as long as the residents agree to it. So far 44 additional homes have agreed to let the EPA do more testing.

Hanger Slams CBS for Dimock Story

NPR-STATEIMPACT Former Department of Environmental Protection Secretary John Hanger says CBS "botched" a piece about Dimock's water contamination. The report aired on Saturday, and the link has no byline, but from the host intro, it sounds like the reporter's name is Tony Gadda. (a search of his name with different spellings didn't turn up anything on the CBS website) The reporter made a common mistake, he turned methane migration into fracking, despite Hanger's best efforts to the contrary. What gets Hanger's goat the most is that the CBS piece makes a direct link between Dimock's water contamination and fracking. Immediately after making that connection, the camera goes to Hanger himself who says "there are 18 water wells that have been impacted by poor gas drilling in Dimock."

Safe Gas Fracking Touted by Obama Disputed by Environmentalists

BLOOMBERG NEWS President Barack Obama's promotion of fracking as a safe way to boost natural gas production is disputed by environmentalists who say the government lacks tough rules to safeguard air and water. Groups such as Protecting Our Waters say hydraulic fracturing -- in which a mix of water, sand and chemicals are shot underground to break apart rock and free gas -- is tainting drinking water and causing more pollution than is cut by the cheap gas. The broad new federal legislation and regulation the groups advocate would tangle up fracking in miles of red tape, industry leaders counter. "We're disappointed in his enthusiasm for shale gas," Iris Marie Bloom, director of Protecting Our Waters in Philadelphia, said in an interview. Obama "spoke about gas as if it's better for the environment, which it's not."

Pennsylvania, two neighbors vie to procure 'cracker'

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW There's a whirlwind of competition swirling among Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia for the chance to start a new generation of industry and manufacturing. Governors jetting off to Houston. State legislation on the fast track. Big tax breaks to be offered for 15 years in one state and 25 years in another. "I'd say it was pretty fever pitch," said Brenda Nichols Harper, vice president and general counsel of the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce. It's all for something called a "cracker." Royal Dutch Shell plc is just weeks from announcing which of the three states it will choose for its petrochemical plant, a cracker that will take ethane from shale gas and turn it into a primary building block for plastic products. The project could cost from \$1 billion to \$4 billion to build and offer hundreds of workers average annual salaries of \$60,000 or more. But that's not the prime reason the governors are courting Shell officials in private, and lawmakers are approving and considering multimillion-dollar tax breaks for some businesses.

Editorial Op-Ed: Governor, lawmakers, we're waiting for Marcellus legislation

PENN LIVE Marcellus Shale was one of the few topics in President Obama's State of Union address that garnered enthusiastic applause from both sides of the aisle. Well, he didn't actually say Marcellus Shale, but he might as well have. He praised the nation's supply of natural gas "that can last America nearly 100 years." He promised to "safely develop" natural gas to support more than 600,000 jobs, "because America will develop this resource without putting the health and safety of our citizens at risk." Frankly, that part of the president's speech sounded a lot like what Republican Gov. Tom Corbett has been saying for a year. But so far in Pennsylvania, it's been all talk and little action. Our state is still without a severance tax or impact fee on Marcellus Shale drillers, let alone updated safety and environmental regulations for the industry. Companies only have to post a \$2,500 bond per well, an amount that hasn't changed since the 1980s and isn't going to go a long way if there's an incident.

Maryland gas-drilling panel starts 2nd round of work

ASSOCIATED PRESS (Md.) (AP) ANNAPOLIS — A state panel is starting work in Annapolis on a second set of recommendations for natural-gas drilling in western Maryland. The Marcellus Shale Advisory Commission meets Friday afternoon in the House of Delegates Office Building. Gov. Martin O'Malley appointed the panel last year to minimize any adverse effects from hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. The drilling technique uses water and chemicals to crack the rock and release the gas. The Department of Natural Resources is scheduled to present plans for monitoring streams and wells for any ill effects. The commission's first report recommended that the state impose a fee on gas leases to fund studies about the impact of drilling. The next set of recommendations due Aug. 1 will cover best practices for exploration and production.

Blog: MD sees Bay cleanup costing \$7.5 billion by 2017

BALTIMORE-SUN Maryland officials have filled in the blanks on their draft Chesapeake Bay cleanup plan, and attached an eye-popping pricetag - \$7.5 billion over the next five years, and nearly double that by 2025. The cost estimates aren't a total shock, as state officials have previously ballparked restoration efforts at around \$15 billion when all was said and done. The plan calls for reducing in-state nitrogen discharges and runoff to the bay by 22 percent and curbing phosphorus nearly 15 percent. The reductions would not fall evenly, with a 30 percent cutback in phosphorus expected from retrofitting storm-water runoff controls in existing communities and a 38 percent drop in nitrogen from septic systems proposed. Even though the O'Malley administration has given itself more time to finish putting bay cleanup measures in place - dropping its 2020 deadline back to 2025, with all the rest of the bay states - Maryland officials still project getting the lion's share of the pollution reductions under way in the next five years. The plan forecasts 78 percent of the nitrogen cutbacks and 98 percent of the phosphorus curbs will be set by 2017. Maryland and the other five states that drain into the Chesapeake Bay have been scrambling since 2010 to come up with detailed blueprints for restoring the ailing estuary, to comply with a "pollution diet" drawn up by the Environmental Protection Agency.

***** MORNING HOT LIST *****

In Dimock, EPA testing draws mixed reaction

SCRANTON TIMES-TRIBUNE DIMOCK TWP. - Two teams of scientists sampling well water from four homes a day are producing a picture of the aquifer under this Susquehanna County town that will help define the impact of natural gas drilling on drinking water. The water captured in vials and packed in coolers by scientists and contractors for the Environmental Protection Agency since Jan. 23 is the heart of an investigation spurred by concerns that Cabot Oil & Gas Corp.'s Marcellus Shale drilling and hydraulic fracturing tainted water wells. In a divided village where gas drilling is as earnestly embraced as it is criticized, the controversy over the EPA's fieldwork started before the sampling did.

EPA will test Susquehanna County water supplies for fracking contamination

READING EAGLE McClachy-Tribune (Sunday) The national agency will also supply drinking water for four Dimock Township homes with water tests already of concern. The federal government was to begin testing water supplies for 61 homes in Dimock Township, Susquehanna County, as soon as Jan. 20 in a dramatic expansion of the Environmental Protection Agency's current investigation into potential contamination by natural gas drilling and hydraulic fracturing. Citing its authority under the Superfund law, the EPA will also begin providing replacement drinking water supplies to four township homes where water tests taken by outside firms raised health concerns - some of them rising to the level of an "imminent and substantial threat" in houses where small children live, the agency said. The EPA reached out to both the state Department of Environmental Protection and Cabot Oil & Gas Corp., the Marcellus Shale driller active in the area, to ask if they would be interested in working with the agency as it collects data. Both agreed to cooperate Jan. 19, but indicated they were not convinced that the EPA's actions were necessary.

State still in running for cracker, Tomblin says

ASSOCIATED PRESS (W. Va.) CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Fresh from a trip to Houston to lure a multibillion-dollar chemical processing plant to West Virginia, Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin may ask the Legislature to consider a new incentive to aid the state's quest, he told The Associated Press in a weekend interview. In his first comments to the media since Thursday's lengthy meeting with potential investors, Tomblin said the proposal involves the potential site for one of these "cracker" plants. He declined to be more specific about the possible incentive. "I'm not sure that I can tell what that is," Tomblin told AP. "We may have to come back to the Legislature another time in order to satisfy some of their needs ... It could very well be this session."

DEP takes public comment on revised oil and gas permits

POTTSTOWN MERCURY HARRISBURG — The Department of Environmental Protection announced today it has submitted a revised version of its erosion and sediment control general permit for earth disturbance associated with oil and gas activities for publication in the Pennsylvania Bulletin, along with four other supporting documents, including a draft permit application and a policy explaining the permit requirements. DEP revised the permit and the associated documents to incorporate recent regulatory revisions, to improve the administration of the program and to implement changes agreed to in a settlement with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Talisman Energy USA Inc. and Ultra Resources Inc. "As a result of this agreement, the department has met with stakeholders from industry and environmental organizations to develop a permit that provides both regulatory certainty and continued protection of the state's waterways," DEP Secretary Mike Krancer said.

Maryland's bay restoration plan available for public comment

ASSOCIATED PRESS (Md.) ANNAPOLIS — Maryland's plan for restoring the Chesapeake Bay is now available for public comment. The state presented the plan to the Environmental Protection Agency last month as part of a new federally led effort to restore the bay. The EPA asked all six states in the bay watershed to present their plans for complying with its so-called "pollution diet" for restoring the nation's largest estuary. The Maryland Department of the Environment is also holding public meetings statewide during the public comment period, which ends March 9. Public meetings will be held in Chestertown, College Park, Hagerstown, Baltimore County and Baltimore.

Septics legislation prompts criticism, confusion

ASSOCIATED PRESS (Md.) BALTIMORE — A reworked bill to control septic systems in Maryland hasn't calmed concerns about state control of local land use, officials with two key stakeholder groups said. Les Knapp Jr., associate director of the Maryland Association of Counties, said it is better than a bill introduced last year but still poses concerns for the state's counties. The largest concern is the expansion of state authority to approve residential subdivisions, he said. Val Connelly, government relations director for the Maryland Farm Bureau, said Friday that the complexity of the bill is an issue, and her group wants to make sure it receives enough study. States in the Chesapeake watershed are working to comply with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's tougher, federally led bay restoration plan that requires additional pollution cuts in all areas. Gov. Martin O'Malley surprised many last year with a proposal to ban septic systems, which are a source of nitrogen pollution, for major new developments.

Fairfax to pay penalty for wastewater spills

WASHINGTON POST Fairfax County has agreed to pay a civil penalty and enter into a consent decree with Virginia's State Water Control Board because of a series of wastewater spills last year, including the discharge of nearly 600,000 gallons of rust-tinged sludge into Pohick Creek and several